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United States Patent [19][11] **Patent Number:** **6,117,235****Toccaceli et al.**[45] **Date of Patent:** **Sep. 12, 2000**[54] **CONTINUOUS COATING AND BREADING APPARATUS**

3228614 2/1984 Germany .

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A machine and method for coating food or other product with a coating material may include a product conveyor belt and at least one roller assembly positioned to cooperate with the conveyor and accept product discharged therefrom. The roller assembly may include a roller and plate which are positioned adjacent one another and define a space therebetween. Products introduced to the roller assembly are pressed between the roller and plate to press the coating material into the product, thereby maximizing percentage pick up of the coating on the product. Additionally, the outer surface of the roller is configured to produce surface characteristics or textures in the coating material which are desired. Different surface characteristics or textures can be created by varying the outer surface configuration or by rotating the roller at a different speed relative to the plate. A series of roller assemblies is preferably used in cooperation with one another to allow flexibility in the types of surface configurations and textures achievable, as well as in the types of products which can be coated. The rollers of the series of cooperating roller assemblies may also form a space therebetween through which products are passed and pressed between respective rollers. Each roller in the cooperating series of roller assemblies may be independently driven at different rotational speeds if desired. The machine and methods achieve excellent coating characteristics and appearance, and can produce unique "homestyle" coating appearances and textures in a continuous coating operation.

20 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets